

**CITY OF BIG RAPIDS
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
November 16, 2016**

Chairperson Schmidt called the November 16, 2016, regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRESENT Sue Bean, Renato Cerdena, Jennifer Cochran, John Schmidt, Tim Vogel, Bill Yontz

EXCUSED

ABSENT Paul Jackson

ALSO PRESENT Mark Sweppenheiser, Neighborhood Services Director
Cindy Plautz, Neighborhood Services

There were 2 people in the audience.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Tim Vogel, seconded by Jennifer Cochran, to approve the minutes of the October 19, 2016, meeting of the Planning Commission as presented.

Motion passed unanimously with all in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT NOT RELATED TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

GENERAL BUSINESS

Discussion concerning whether to allow residents to raise chickens within City limits.

Sweppenheiser said that recently there has been talk about allowing chickens to be kept within City limits. He has received a letter from Matt Nikkari who said he would be interested in raising chickens due to his wife's dietary needs and he would like the City Commission to refer

the matter to the Planning Commission. His neighbors would also be interested in keeping chickens.

The act would involve an ordinance change. He suggested a committee to review the idea and added that chickens are not covered under the Right to Farm Act. Currently, chickens are not specifically prohibited by the Ordinance. Additionally, there are only a handful properties within the City limits that are large enough to allow animals other than household pets. Per Sub-Section 91.02 - Animals Prohibited; Exceptions, It shall be unlawful for any person to keep any animal or fowl within 500 feet of a dwelling, street, alley or public place...

Sweppenheiser received two letters of support from residents Judy Tressler - 506 Winter, and Don Steffin - 605 Willow. He also received verbal support from Mark and Jody Speas who would be in favor of keeping up to 4 or 5 chickens. He also said there were people in the area of Linden and Winter who were in favor.

John Schmidt provided a guide from the City of Salem, Oregon concerning the keeping of chickens. He thought that perhaps Big Rapids could use it as a guide to set up its own regulations for allowing chickens to be kept in the City.

Vogel believes that there should be a group of interested citizens that would be interested in developing the guidelines. He advised the Commission not to jump into this without study. He is not in favor of allowing chickens to be kept in the City as it would create one more thing that the City has to monitor. He added that the City of Tecumseh brought the idea to a vote of the people who voted it down. He again stressed the importance of an organized group to champion the idea.

Cerdena added that with the keeping of chickens comes the potential of viruses being spread from birds to chickens and from chickens to birds.

Yontz stated that he is disappointed that those who are interested in the idea are not present. Sweppenheiser agreed.

Schmidt asked how to take the idea forward. There are families interested who don't know where to start.

Yontz stated that due to limited farming, people may have to go back to growing their own food. People will need guidance to do so.

Bean added that her daughter has chickens and she thinks it is a great idea, but the City needs to see some interested parties take the lead. Perhaps ideas can be gotten from other communities.

Yontz wondered if the City could publicize information and ask for feedback.

Schmidt thought that the idea should be studied before it is put out to the public.

Sweppenheiser said that if he took a guess, he thought less than 10 people would want chickens. But, if the community wants chickens it could be regulated by permit. Complaints by concerned citizens would also help to control.

Bean would not be in favor of retail of the chickens or eggs but would favor the keeping of 2 to 3 chickens.

Schmidt added that this is a small town and farm fresh eggs are available nearby. He would like to see all the pros and cons considered while keeping the best interest of the City in mind. Does the City change the Ordinance for 10 people? What would the impact on local farmers be? He would like to see a task force to study the idea. There is also the cost of keeping chickens that people should consider.

Sweppenheiser said to let him know if they hear of anyone that would like to champion the idea.

Redevelopment Ready Community

Sweppenheiser reviewed the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) program saying that the City Commission passed a resolution in favor of applying for the status. The program requires our Master Plan to be up to date. The last time it was updated was in 2009, so it needs to be updated to be eligible for the program.

As a part of the Master Plan update, we need to look at the future Focus Areas. The City has contracted with Dave Bee of the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) to help with the Master Plan update. The City will be responsible for providing any maps that may need to be updated.

Bee added that typically they only engage in a "bare bones" Master Plan as they don't want to compete with the professionals in Michigan that do this for a living. It can take a couple of years to complete a plan. He explained his plan for the update:

1. Update the introduction
2. Update Community Description
3. Revisit Goals and Objectives – make sure the plan is still pertinent
4. Modify Future Land Use Plan, Text, Tables and Maps
5. Adoption
6. Create Electronic Version

Dave will begin when the City is ready. It will take approximately 8 months to complete. A draft must go to the Township and the County for their review. The Township has 65 to 70 days

to comment and the County has 90 days. The City Commission can approve it or send it back for revisions. The process follows the Enabling Act.

To be eligible for the RRC, someone from the City must go through all the training, adopt a resolution in support and be actively working on the requirements.

Cerdena asked if the City knows how many people would be affected by a change in a Focus Area. Sweppenheiser explained that the changes are usually a re-zoning. Cerdena commented that the Census data is not narrowed down to our needs - the block groups are too large. He would be interested in seeing social economic values. He wondered if a survey could be done. As surveys are expensive, he suggested a sampling of data and suggested that FSU students could help. Response rates to surveys are usually low. Vogel added that tax records can be used for property information but not income information.

Vogel asked about the Master Plan Focus Areas and if the Hanchett property will be included. Sweppenheiser said it will be recommended as a Focus Area in the updated Master Plan. It is now zoned Industrial, as is Simonds. The Water Plant is zoned Residential. Schmidt believes the area could change tremendously while Sweppenheiser said the potential for a big change is not that great.

Sweppenheiser added that the Focus Areas were chosen as areas that may need to be rezoned. Schmidt asked if they need to be addressed soon or if we merely need to keep an eye on them. Sweppenheiser explained that long term plans don't work. Ferris State University had a 30-year Master Plan for development and they got rid of it as needs and wants change over time.

Currently the City needs to update the Master Plan to be in conformance with the 5-year update requirement. Plans made further out than 5 years are difficult because the City doesn't know ahead of time exactly what the budget will be for needed projects.

Cochran suggested that the Master Plan should be reviewed once a year to check on progress and to review the "big picture".

Dave Bee added that the Hanchett property may be a tool to get the RRC status as currently there is no guidance and the City could use the MEDC to assist and figure out long range possibilities.

There will be a public component to the Master Plan and RRC processes.

Yontz was concerned about bringing business to the City that will bring in revenue. Both residential and business properties bring tax dollars to the City. Sweppenheiser added that a Real Estate developer was hired to market the Hanchett property.

Bean added that the property is unique as it is river front property.

Bee said this property should be in a Focus Area and a plan should be developed. He asked if the MEDC is aware of the property. He suggested using the process and taking the time to figure out what is best. Being located on the river makes it an asset.

Schmidt questioned the potential use as it was an industrial site. He also asked, since the airport is City owned, should it be part of the Master Plan. Bee will work with the City to comply with its wishes

There being no further business, Chairperson Schmidt called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion was made by Jennifer Cochran, seconded by Tim Vogel to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m. with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia J. Plautz
Planning Commission Secretary